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EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP IN A DEMOCRACY DISCUSSION¹

RICHARD S. CHILDS, President, National Short Ballot Organization: Our legislative bodies in America, both national and state, are chaotic in their management compared with the parliamentary bodies of Europe, and it is because they lack anything which can properly be described as even approaching a ministry. We think of a ministry as something that concerns countries that have kings and crowns, but we should have in this country something comparable thereto in order to give a spinal column to our legislative efforts.

Let us therefore formalize existing practice and procedure. At the present time, every governor, every president has his kitchen cabinet, composed of certain leaders of the legislative body in whom he has confidence. He deals with those men unofficially, almost in a secret manner, as if it were something of which to be ashamed. Through the medium of those trusted friends in the two houses he deals with his legislative body. Let us carry that existing and necessary practice a step further. Formalize it, set it up, with good reason behind it, as a thing to be recognized by all men, and call upon our chief executive to select from the two houses of the legislature a group of leaders who are able to work acceptably with him, and who are acceptable to the two houses of the legislature. Let him meet with this legislative cabinet once a week or as often as the work may require. Let him thus sit down with half a dozen members of the legislature and with them formulate the party policy for the session, set before the legislature its annual task and determine what bills shall be called administration bills with the prestige of the governor behind them. Let this legislative cabinet be the body to prepare and put before the legislature each year the "administration measures." Can you not see that to be a member of the governor's cabinet, this legislative cabinet, would give certain members of the legislature more authority on the floor and establish their leadership as being consistent with that of the governor? At present we have three leaderships: the governor with his messages and his power to get publicity; the leaders of the upper house; the leaders of the lower house—three separate leaderships.

Let us bring them together into a committee, consolidate them, and all three forces will gain effectiveness. It is necessary, however, that the governor should select them, and not have the individual houses elect them, because it is absolutely necessary that such a body shall be harmonious, and as the governor is a fixed point, we have to let him pick the members of such a committee from the two houses.

No legislative body has ever been a success without an arrangement

¹Before the National Conference on War Economy, June 5, 1917.

very much like that. With it, I believe we should soon get into a condition where the main measures to be put through each year would be the product of that committee, aided as it would be by all the resources of the governor's administrative staff.

Its legislation would be scientific, and against that legislation the bill that is proposed by the farmer from some remote village, written by a lawyer at home, amended and mutilated in some committee of the legislature, and jammed through one house on sentiment regardless of facts and science, would have no chance whatever. More and more the leadership would follow the main track that is created, and the rank and file of the legislature would fall into the position for which they are ideally fitted, that of being pure representatives, passing the bills in review and acting on them in accordance with the views of those they represent. That is their function. Keep them to it, and the present legislators will make good for all of us.

WILLIAM P. BURR, Corporation Counsel, New York city¹: Here in the City of New York we are confronted with extraordinary conditions with regard to the questions of the subway contracts. Here is a great work practically completed, and yet threatened with abandonment unless some relief can be extended to the men who have engaged to build this great work, in view of the conditions which did not confront them at the time when the contracts were made. The increased cost of materials, the higher rates for labor must all be adjusted, or these men may go into bankruptcy, and the great project fail. That is one of the questions which come up and must be solved. Can it be solved by allowing these men to abandon the contracts, or will it be solved by continuing the contracts with the city acting as the banker to advance the money before the payments are due in order to enable them to carry on this work? So also with the railways. Shall the rates of fare be increased? Should they be increased in view of the contractual relations which have existed for years and under which the franchises were originally obtained? Will the price of gas go up because of the higher price of the commodities that go into its making? Must the general consumers meet that condition and pay the higher rate, notwithstanding the fact that the rate is fixed by statute? Must these increased expenses be met by the companies or by the citizens?

All these complex municipal questions must be met by intelligently directed public action. This can only be effected if we are alive both to the needs of our own city and the magnitude of our national task.

¹In presenting the greetings of the City of New York to the National Conference on War Economy, June 5, 1918.